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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

17 October 1984

ISRAEL: Preparing Withdrawal Options

Summary

Prime Minister Peres's national unity government appears to be moving toward an early decision on reducing Israel's military presence in southern Lebanon by next summer. As part of any arrangement with Lebanon and Syria to decrease Israeli forces in Lebanon, Israel will demand a security zone for protecting its northern border and will accept only the Army of South Lebanon (ASL) and residual Israeli Army units in the zone. Israel wants UNIFIL as a buffer north of the zone. If the Syrians and Lebanese will not agree to redefine UNIFIL's mandate and accept the ASL, the Israeli Army probably is prepared to withdraw unilaterally from its current positions to new ones that will permit it to decrease its troops in Lebanon from 9,500 to about 3,000. [redacted]

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Israeli Army officials are becoming increasingly hesitant about the ASL's ability to function as a buffer security force. We believe the ASL could effectively control western Lebanon south of the Awwali River only if it is integrated with the Lebanese Army and accepted by the Lebanese Government. For this reason, Israel probably will insist on a residual Israeli presence in the ASL barring acceptance of ASL leader Lahad as regional commander of the south by Beirut and Damascus. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared [redacted] the Israel/Palestinian Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 17 October 1984 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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Prime Minister Peres stated in a recent interview that he will decide soon on a plan to pull Israeli forces out of Lebanon by next summer. He also said Israel is prepared to withdraw its troops from the Bekaa Valley if they are replaced by a UN force. He stressed an Israeli pullback is not conditional on a parallel Syrian move. []

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Israel's Security Requirements in Lebanon

Israel defines as its vital security zone for protecting its northern border a 30 kilometer arc drawn from Metulla. This is the nominal maximum range of a Katyusha rocket or Soviet-made 130-mm artillery piece, the weapons most used in the past by the PLO against Israel's northern settlements. The Israelis want security arrangements that will prevent PLO reinfiltration into this zone. An agreement with the Lebanese and an "understanding" with the Syrians fulfilling this fundamental security requirement probably would result in Israel's complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon. []

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Israel has pursued a two-prong strategy in Lebanon to obtain adequate security arrangements for its northern border since the collapse of the 17 May agreement. It has concentrated on building up the Army of South Lebanon (ASL)--the core of which is Major Haddad's former militia--to assume security duties from the IDF while maintaining close liaison with the major Lebanese factions to prevent a PLO return to the Shuf. It also has tried to interest the Syrians in a disengagement accord in the Bekaa Valley to lower the risk of an inadvertent clash there and to minimize the threat from Bekaa-based Palestinian and Shia terrorism. []

Despite the failure of this strategy to produce arrangements that would allow Israel to decrease its troop levels in southern Lebanon--constant at 9,500 since early 1983--the Israelis currently see no alternative. They have no faith in President Gemayel's ability to assert his authority outside of East Beirut or the Lebanese Army's ability to prevent PLO reinfiltration into the south. Syrian cooperation is essential to the ultimate success of this strategy, but the Israelis remain pessimistic that President Assad will accept a disengagement agreement in the Bekaa Valley. As a result, the Israeli Army has been erecting an infrastructure in southern Lebanon that would facilitate a unilateral redeployment and a significant decrease in Israeli forces if Syria and Lebanon refuse to cooperate. []

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Israel's Military Infrastructure in Southern Lebanon

In the western sector of southern Lebanon, the Israeli Army has about 3,000 troops, most of whom are positioned along the Awwali River or near Tyre and An-Nabatiyah. Israel has been gradually turning over security functions between the Awwali and Litani Rivers to General Lahad's Army of South Lebanon with the clear intent eventually to withdraw most Israeli troops from this sector. Most key road junctions and river crossings now have ASL

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or joint ASL/Israeli checkpoints at them. [REDACTED]

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In the eastern sector, the Israeli Army could unilaterally withdraw to a line running roughly between the Qirawn Dam and north of Rashayya. It has erected a series of antitank ditches along its current frontlines that effectively channel an attacking force along two roads easily covered by prepared artillery positions on the southern Sannin ridgeline and south of the Qirawn Dam. [REDACTED]

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If the IDF redeploys along these lines, it will be able to decrease its troop strength in the Bekaa from 6,500 to probably less than 3,000 and withdraw almost entirely from the west. Its supply lines would be considerably shorter and run only through the old Haddad enclave which is composed primarily of friendly Christian and Druze villages. Israeli soldiers--except those remaining in predominantly Shia areas around An-Nabatiyah--would be relatively safe from attack. [REDACTED]

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Ability of ASL to Provide Security

Serious confessional problems also confront the ASL. Its ethnic composition and political orientation are suited only to the old, narrow Haddad enclave just north of the Israeli border. [REDACTED] the force is 60 percent Christian, 17 percent Shia, 15 percent Druze, and 8 percent Sunni, with the majority of its officers Christian. More than half of the population in the security zone--about 250,000--are Shia, and most regard the ASL and its leader, Antoine Lahad, as Israeli surrogates. [REDACTED]

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The ASL's propensity to violence disturbs many IDF officers and will further alienate the Shia inhabitants of the south. A [REDACTED] new ASL recruits look and act like thugs, which is consistent with past reporting on the earlier Haddad militia. The recent massacre of Shia villagers in Suhmur by Druze soldiers of the ASL portends more of the same. [REDACTED]

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Israeli advisers, even in large numbers, cannot prevent massacres or enhance significantly the capabilities of the ASL. The Israelis have assigned at least one advisor to every infantry, armor, and artillery company and at least 20 officers ranging from Colonel to 1st Lieutenant to Lahad's headquarters. This has not noticeably improved the ASL's performance, and, in the event of an Israeli withdrawal, these officers no longer will have the full power of the Israeli Army nearby to ensure compliance with their orders. In the event of another Suhmur-type incident, having Israeli officers attached to ASL units would ensure that Israel would be implicated. []

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We believe the ASL could effectively control western Lebanon south of the Awwali River only if it is integrated with the Lebanese Army and accepted by the Lebanese Government. Israel's insistence on a residual presence in southern Lebanon to support the ASL and Syrian unwillingness to concede a role for Lahad, however, ensures that Beirut will not cut a deal. []

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Syrian Position

Syria has little incentive to be forthcoming with Israel at this point. The Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon is reaping Damascus political benefits in the Arab world as well as giving it important leverage in Beirut. Israel is not likely to initiate hostilities against Syria given the general war-weariness of the Israeli populace, and the IDF is under constant attack, mainly by disgruntled Lebanese Shia not affiliated with any particular radical group. []

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reports that--contrary to official Israeli reporting--IDF positions near Tyre are hit by Katyusha rockets at least every other night. Israeli soldiers have assumed a lower profile in the more heavily populated areas and rarely leave their positions except to patrol in force. President Assad probably assumes that constant or increasing levels of casualties eventually will force the IDF to withdraw, thus freeing Syria of the need to compromise. []

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Israeli Options

Without Syrian cooperation, Israel's options are limited to a series of unilateral actions. In western Lebanon, the IDF probably will remain in its current positions through the winter but will completely turn over security functions to the ASL in the spring, at least between the Awwali and Litani Rivers. The ASL^{25X1} probably will not remain in Sidon or Batir Ash Shuf without Israeli protection but instead will occupy positions in the less populated areas just south of the current Israeli lines. []

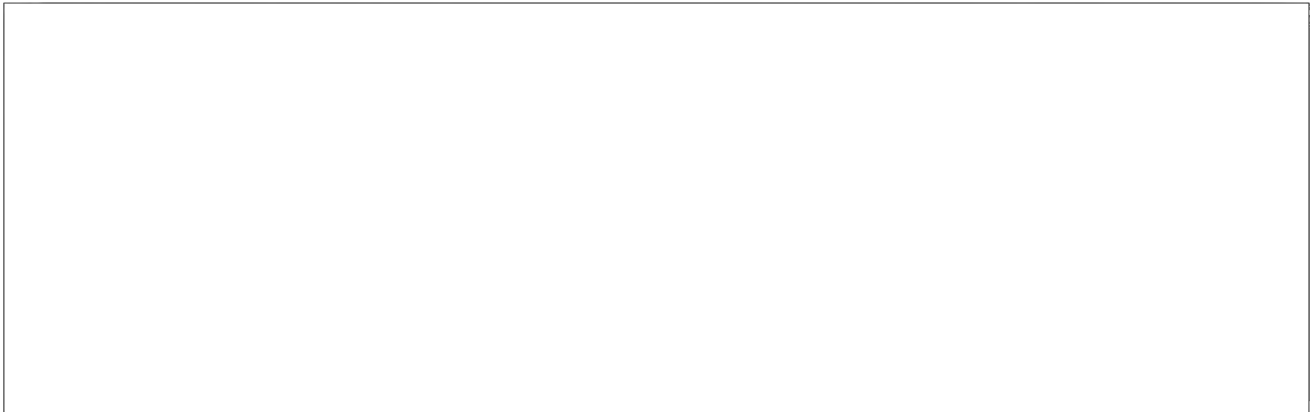
In eastern Lebanon, the Israelis' road building and other infrastructure work suggest the IDF has the option to retain the Jebel Baruk site and defensive positions along the ridgeline while redeploying southward on the valley floor. Israeli forces then would stay put on these lines until an alternative acceptable to

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Israel and Syria could be negotiated with the Lebanese Government. Israel's current negotiating position, however, is that it will not unilaterally withdraw from its positions in the Bekaa Valley without prior security arrangements. [REDACTED] 25X1

Israel would like UNIFIL to take over the areas it vacates outside of Lahad's area of responsibility, but the UN, Lebanon, and Syria are unlikely to agree to redefine UNIFIL's mandate unless it is linked to a timetable for complete Israeli withdrawal. Syria, in particular, will not agree to any force that perpetuates a separate enclave for Israel in southern Lebanon. The UN probably will insist the LAF deploy with UNIFIL to provide security for the local populace and the Palestinian refugee camps in Sidon, but Beirut is not anxious to assume this role given the weakness of the Lebanese Army. [REDACTED] 25X1



An Israeli pullback from the Awwali River without a buffer force in place, however, almost certainly will result in renewed bloodshed in the Shuf. Israel's periodic intervention north of the Awwali has kept the Druze and Lebanese Forces from fighting over the Kharrub and prevented the PLO from returning there.



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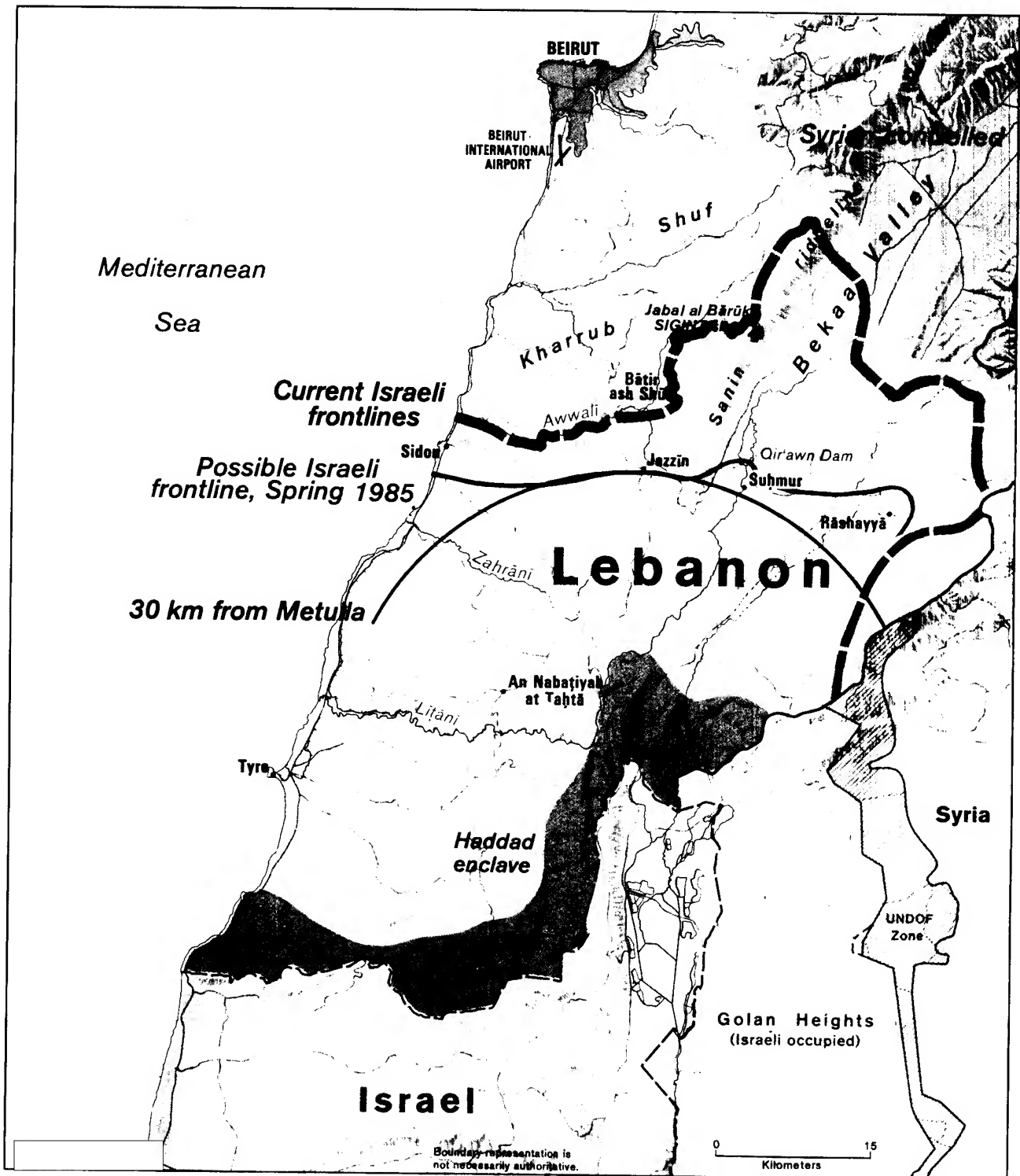
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